



FACT SHEET: The U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program

Refugees Undergo the Greatest and Most Rigorous Screening

Refugees being resettled in the U.S. already undergo the most thorough and rigorous screening and security vetting of any visitor to the U.S., and screening for Syrian refugees is even more stringent.

- Unlike the situation in Europe in which refugees have arrived by land by the hundreds of thousands, the very small number of Syrian and Iraqi refugees considered by the United States for resettlement undergo intense and recurrent security screening before they are accepted and ultimately admitted to the U.S. [Interaction, [11/19/15](#); AILA, 11/18/15; WSJ, [11/18/15](#)]
- Refugees do not select the country they are referred to. Instead, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the organization in charge of protecting and assisting refugees, refers refugees to one of the nearly thirty countries currently accepting refugees for resettlement based on those countries' criteria. Because of the very tough security screening required by U.S. law, only 0.5% of the 4 million Syrian refugees (around 20,000) have been referred to the United States for consideration. The U.S. will then conduct its own screening and take only a small fraction of those referred to the U.S. for consideration.
- The refugee screening and vetting process for individuals who may be resettled in the U.S. occurs over the 18 to 24-month period before a refugee is even able to travel to the United States.
- This process, which has been significantly enhanced in the last several years, involves Federal intelligence, security, and law enforcement agencies (like the National Counterterrorism Center, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Departments of Homeland Security, State and Defense) and includes biometric and biographic checks, as well as medical screenings and lengthy interviews by trained Department of Homeland Security (DHS) personnel. [White House, [11/18/15](#)]
- First, UNHCR encounters refugees in United Nations refugee camps where it registers each individual and conducts a first screening, including establishing the individual's identity through biometric data. That information carries through with the individual for all future screenings as a way of ensuring identity and checking for any inconsistencies as more information is collected. UNHCR interviews individuals and makes a determination for referral for resettlement in a third country based on vulnerability, security, and medical information.

- UNHCR only refers “[a] refugee that meets one of the criteria for resettlement in the United States” and is likely to pass the very high security bars established in U.S. law to the U.S. government. [HSGAC Hearing, [11/19/15](#); U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, accessed [1/14/16](#)]
- If a country rejects a refugee referral, UNHCR is very unlikely to make a second referral for that individual because of resource demands and so it only refers individuals it believes have a strong likelihood of being accepted.
- To be considered a refugee, an individual must prove that they have been driven from their home country based on a fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or their political opinion. [White House, [11/24/15](#)]
- Less than 1 percent of all refugees will be resettled in a third-party country, and in a given year only about 2, 000 of the 23, 000 Syrian refugees that UNHCR has referred to the U.S. have been admitted. [UNHCR, accessed [1/14/16](#); UNHCR, [12/20/15](#)]
- UNHCR understands how high U.S. standards are for the acceptance of refugees, therefore it strives to send only refugee cases that it thinks the U.S. will accept and works to screen out people who wouldn’t qualify for resettlement under U.S. law.
- Second, the Department of State then conducts a number of security checks using the personal and background data collected by the Resettlement Support Center, contracted by the Department of State. [U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, accessed [1/14/16](#)]
- If an individual is cleared by the Department of State, they are then referred to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), which fingerprints and photographs them. Those fingerprints are then run through other law enforcement databases. [HSGAC Hearing, [11/19/15](#); U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, accessed [1/14/16](#)]
 - These individuals are then interviewed by a USCIS officer in their home country or their country of refuge. This interview is used to determine whether “an individual qualifies as a refugee and is admissible under U.S. law” and, if applicable, to conditionally approve a refugee’s resettlement application. [U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, accessed [1/14/16](#)]
- A refugee that has been approved for resettlement in the U.S. must also undergo medical screening and cultural orientation, as well as pass a second interagency check before they are able to travel to the United States. [U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, accessed [1/14/16](#)]
- Before an individual arrives in the U.S., the U.S. Custom and Border Protection (CBP) “receives a manifest of all refugees who have prior approval to travel to the United States.” It uses this manifest to initiate additional vetting before such refugees’ arrival. [USCIS, [9/30/15](#)]
- Once an individual arrives in the U.S., a CBP officer will review each refugee’s “documentation and conduct additional security checks to ensure that the arriving

refugee is the same person who was screened and approved for admission to the United States.” [U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, accessed [1/14/16](#)]

- If concerns are identified during any part of the refugee screening process, then an individual will be moved into a special group and their application will receive additional scrutiny. If those concerns cannot be resolved, the application will be denied. [HSGAC Hearing, [11/19/15](#)]
- Syrian refugees undergo additional security screening through the Syria Enhanced Review process, which includes a thorough pre-interview analysis by trained fraud detection and national security officials. [UNHCR, [12/20/15](#)]
 - DHS interviewers also receive intensive, Syria-specific training before they conduct interviews with refugee applicants.

Background on the Current Refugee Process for Those from Syria and Iraq

- Since 1975, the U.S. has welcomed more than 3 million refugees. [Fact Sheet: Refugee Resettlement in the United States, 1/13/16]

Thus far, refugees admitted to the U.S. from Syria have been upstanding individuals, the majority of which have been women, children, and the elderly.

- The world currently faces “the most horrific global refugee crises since the Second World War, with 60 million displaced across the globe.” [The Hill, [11/12/15](#); Letter to Members of Congress, [11/17/15](#)]
- It is estimated that as many as 4.6 million Syrians have fled from their home country as a result of the Syrian civil war. [CNN, [9/10/15](#); UNHCR, [12/29/15](#)]
 - Women and children are believed to constitute 75 percent of this population. [UNHCR, [12/29/15](#); Letter from 140 Local, State, National, and Global Groups, [11/30/15](#)]
- Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, the U.S. has admitted only about 1,500 Syrian refugees. [CNN, [9/10/15](#); Lake Research Partners, 11/25/15; WSJ, [11/18/15](#)]
 - Half of the Syrian refugees admitted to the U.S. have been children, while a quarter of such refugees have been adults over 60. Those single men that have been admitted (2 percent in Fiscal Year 2014) have largely been the victims of torture.
 - The President has announced a plan to resettle an additional 10,000 Syrian refugees during Fiscal Year 2016. [White House, [11/24/15](#); Letter to Democratic Leader Reid, 11/19/15]
 - As Secretary Johnson has pointed out, “[t]his represents a modest commitment by our government to accept less than one percent of the approximately 4 million Syrian refugees in the world.” [Letter to Democratic Leader Reid, 11/19/15]

- Other countries, like Canada and France, have also pledged to accept Syrian refugees.
 - “[T]he new government of ... Canada ... has pledged to accept 25,000 Syrian refugees this calendar year. President Hollande of France ... [also] reiterated his nation’s commitment to accepting Syrian refugees.” [Letter to Democratic Leader Reid, 11/19/15]

Large-scale Iraqi refugee processing began in 2007 and prioritizes especially vulnerable refugees, like religious minorities and those who are affiliated with or have assisted the U.S. government. [USCIS, accessed [1/18/16](#)]

- Since that time, 203,321 Iraqi nationals have been referred to the U.S. for resettlement. [USCIS, accessed [1/18/16](#)]
- These referrals led to 142,670 applicant interviews, 119,202 resettlement approvals, and 84,902 Iraqi resettlements in the U.S. [USCIS, accessed [1/18/16](#)]
- Like Syrian refugees, Iraqi refugees applying for resettlement in the U.S. are subject to an enhanced background and security check process that includes biographic and biometric checks. [USCIS, accessed [1/18/16](#)]